

## ECKINGTON WI POTTED HISTORY

"The Womens Institute is based on the spiritual ideals of fellowship, truth, tolerance and justice".

Eckington WI first formed in 1920 but was suspended in 1934. Four years later, in 1938, it was re-formed. The Institute started on Monday evenings at 7pm with a membership of 25, rising to a total of 92 in 1953-1954.

### 1930s/1940s

In 1939, when war was imminent and finally became a sad fact. WI members raised money for the blacking out of the Village Hall, undertook a billeting survey for the evacuation of townspeople and helped with the distribution and care of evacuated children.

The chief war effort was the Canning Centre, inaugurated by the WI and widely used by everyone in the village. From 1941, the Canning Centre was based in the stables of the hostel for evacuated children (now Elm House). During 1941 - 1942, 3,393 pounds of jam were produced with 3,301 cans of fruit sealed. The enterprise was hugely successful and became a daily occupation until the end of the war.

During the war, talks were given at meetings to encourage members to make do and mend, preserve fruit, use the garden and natural things around to help with the war effort. WI members were responsible for raising money for the Comforts Fund (sending parcels to overseas serving people), Red Cross, Salute the Soldier Campaign, European Clothing Relief Fund, British Sailors Society, European Clothing Relief Fund and Wings for Victory.

Meetings were on a Monday with the format of business, speaker and social half hour. Occasionally, during the war years, if a speaker had distance to travel, then it would have been necessary, due to blackout restrictions, to provide overnight accommodation for the speaker!

### 1950s

From 1946 to 1953, Eckington WI regularly received a parcel from Drumquin WI in Ontario, Canada. The parcel contained items such as cosmetics, tea &

*\*1 As part of the 2018 celebrations, attempts were made to connect to Drumquin WI but enquiries suggested this WI has closed.*



dried fruit. The connection between the WIs was as a result of a member (unidentified) who married to become Mrs Tallyn who then emigrated to Canada\*<sup>1</sup>.

In 1952, Eckington WI helped towards the fundraising for the local Lower Avon Navigation Trust. The same year, the vicar's wife, Mrs Mallam, appealed to the WI for assistance in formation of a Baby Clinic/Welfare Clinic: many members responded and the Clinic was formed and certainly was running upto 1978\*<sup>2</sup>.

From September 1950, the Monday meetings were changed to the first Wednesday of each month, a date still kept today. Social half hours providing amusing competitions, such as 'best polished shoes', 'fanning the kipper'. Another regular feature was a popular New Year Party which was held regularly through the 50s but dying out in 1962, being replaced in the 1960s with Harvest Suppers.

## 1960s

The 1960s were extremely productive and highly successful for Eckington WI. The Eckington WI Drama Group was originally formed in the late 1950s when all 8 Institutes in the Pershore Group were asked to contribute a 10 minute sketch as entertainment for a Group Meeting. Interest and confidence grew within Eckington with occasional charades and sketches being performed at monthly meetings. In 1962, the Drama Group entered the WFWI Drama Festival with an excerpt from 'A Midsummers Night Dream' and won the Lady Carlton Shield. Spurred on by this success, the Drama Group presented '1066 and All That' at the Village Hall. It was a highly ambitious and highly successful musical comedy involving 100 characters played by 28 cast members (including help from husbands & children), produced by Irene Webb and Margery Record. The following year, there was a repeat performance to help with the depleted Village Hall funds. There were further occasional performances for WI meetings and the Drama Group performed 'Anticlockwise' in 1964 for a Pershore Group Meeting.

The entertainment gene was clearly running through Eckington WI in the 60s as a new Eckington WI Choir was performed. Under the guidance of Mrs Banbury, the choir won several competitions over the years: April 1962 they won a cup at the WFWI Annual Singing Festival; May 1962, another win with the Cheltenham Music Festival Ladies Village Choirs Cup; 1963 runners-up at the WFWI Festival with 2 more awards the following year; finally in 1965 (NFWI Golden Jubilee

*\*<sup>2</sup> The '1938-1978, 40 Years Memories' booklet produced in 1978 states the Clinic was still running at that time. It is not clear when it ceased operating but at the time of writing (2019), it was closed.*



Year), they won all 3 trophies at the WFWI Festival and were invited to sing at special celebratory concerts. Unfortunately Eckington were snowbound and unable to attend the event at Worcester.

The Village Hall was again the beneficiary of Eckington WI talents as in 1965, Eckington WI Choir presented a concert "Gay Nineties" to help raise funds for the Hall's re-wiring fund.

In 1965, as part of the NFWI Golden Jubilee celebrations, each WI was challenged to compile a scrapbook of their village life over the year. Eckington's scrapbook was highly commended and can now be found in Worcester County Records Office.

The Produce Guild continued to flourish with Produce Shows being held in the village. Members also exhibited items at the Annual Produce Show at Malvern. In 1969 & 1970, the WI won the Rose Bowl for their entries in the Evesham Flower Show. Equally active was the Handicraft Guild whose highlight was an Exhibition of Arts and Crafts at the Village Hall in 1963. During this period, there were a number of workshops for WI members including rugmaking, pewter work, millinery, rushwork to name but a few.

1969 was the beginning of the NFWI Good Neighbours Policy. Volunteers arranged the collection of prescriptions, visits to old folk and to members in hospital, as well as assisting with transport for medical appointments. Assistance was provided with the 'meals on wheels' service and it was following a suggestion from the WI meeting that this service was introduced to the village, and thereafter neighbouring villages too.

## **1970s**

Of course one of the major events of the decade was the Queen's Silver Jubilee. Eckington WI participated with a WI float decorated in WI colours as well as providing a Jubilee Tea to our senior citizens. Founder members were present and the honour of cutting the celebration cake was given to our oldest surviving founder member, Mrs H Gilson.

1978 was the 40<sup>th</sup> year of Eckington WI and an excuse for another party and cake, as well as a Birthday Concert given by the Cotswold Male Voice Choir. Clearly a good year for WI as member Carol Checketts received a National WI Design Award for her embroidered birds.



## 1980s

The village throughout the 70s & 80s organised May Day Processions. The WI were keen participants: 1982 Votes for Women & 1983 Breakfast Television.

The Domesday Project took place in 1985 and Eckington WI were involved in recording a specified area of land for the BBC project; the Project Book is now in archive at Worcester.

Our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Party was a buffet party with entertainment including the committee acting out The Lighthouse Keeper's Daughter.

We made the papers in several ways. First in 1980, the local papers reported on our Fashion Show, run in partnership with Seal of Pershore; 1983 and several members were pictured taking part in the County sponsored swim; more sensationally perhaps in 1987, the headlines were 'sleepy village lays its erotic secret bare' as Peta Whitlock introduced belly dancing classes to the village. As a WI member herself, it was no surprise the papers picked up the fact that some of the ladies were WI members.

As well as the exotic dancing, members were competing at the County Competitions with some success as follows:

Highly Commended Certificate for an embroidered wall panel by Liz Wilkes.

3<sup>rd</sup> Mary Pedley Award for a woodcarving of a hand by Alex Smith

2<sup>nd</sup> Flower Arranging by Edna Woodcock- just missing out on the opportunity to be the Worcs representative for the Huxley Cup at The Royal Show

1<sup>st</sup> Award at the Home Economics and Craft Rally in 1981 for "Off to Play School".

## 1990s

1991 reported to be a difficult year for Eckington with talk of closure with the President standing down due to the 'apathetic response of members'; however, members promised to more forthcoming and so a crisis averted.

The rest of the decade was business as usual with talks, fundraising & visits and Eckington WI quietly going along. On reviewing the Annual Reports, one constant feature was the 'provision of gifts for the elderly residents of Heathlands and the supply, wrapping and selling of mystery parcels for the Village Fete.



By the end of the millennium, membership had gone steadily down, ending with a membership in 1999 of 32. What would the 21<sup>st</sup> Century bring?

## **2000s**

Eckington WI seemed to be inspired by the new millennium

The Walking Group was very active, stepping out most Mondays with husbands, partners and dogs occasionally in tow. Fashion Shows were, well, still in fashion particularly useful for hosting a Group meeting which we did in 2005. Visits to No.8 Pershore were also frequent. Garden Parties in the summer & Harvest Festival Suppers were still a regular feature with other visits including Isbourne Holistic Centre and the occasional River Cruise. A Lunch Club was introduced in 2008 and proved to be very popular.

The business of Eckington WI undertook a couple of changes during this period. In 2004, members agreed that the County Newsletters would be paid from our WI funds. By 2006, the format for the meetings had changed from Business first followed by the Speaker, to Speaker first followed by Business. The Denman Bursary was still popular although it had been reduced to £50, enough for a day course.

Although still competition shy, we did have success in 2008 when our Quiz Team won the County Area Competition and made it into the County Finals; we didn't win the Final though.

Numbers took a dip at the beginning of the 2000s, going down to 24 but gradually increasing to 33 towards the end.

## **2010s**

Our support for the village has been constant throughout our history and the 2010s were no exception. We have provided cookery lessons at Eckington CofE School, looked after the Eckington Book Exchange (aka the old telephone box), the Village Flower Boxes and provided support at Eckstock. We also started a Craft Club, known as WITCH (W.I. The Craft Hub), which met from September to March and was open to non-WI members; we had crafters from the village and locale, as well as our own members and regulars from Kemerton WI.

Fundraising is always a concern but following an idea by Cynthia Mortimer, Eckington WI started the Village Garage Sales; by co-ordinating location of garage sales, car parks & maps, the WI enabled villagers to come together to



sell their wares and with WI providing refreshments, our funds were annually refreshed. This enabled to subsidise trips, special meetings etc.

Nationally, WIs saw an upsurge in new Institutes being formed and what was particularly pleasing was the number of younger ladies setting these up, bringing modern and fresh outlooks to our ever-developing organisation. An innovation by this fresh intake was WI Festival; first started by a group of like-minded ladies from up north, they created their own local festival in 2014 where ideas were swapped, new updated crafts were on offer and opportunities to have fun abounded. They were encouraged to run an unofficial WI Festival in 2015 where 500 members from around the UK joined in the fun. Well, who could resist? So 4 of us from Eckington joined in the fun at Walesby Forest for Tea & Tents in 2015 - certainly an experience. The idea has been picked up and now there are several unofficial Festivals throughout the year and around the country, including Jam Jars & Tent Pegs in Lancashire to which 2 of us went in 2017.

Perhaps one of the highlights of the decade was our 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebrations in 2018. We held an Open Day where villagers were invited to celebrate with us at the Village Hall. There were free refreshments, competitions, displays, exhibitions and craft corners and was a great success. For our members, we held a Birthday Party 1938 style with food and dress appropriate for the period as well as holding competitions as found in the WI Record for that year. An anniversary mug was also produced. A separate scrapbook has been prepared for this special event.

In an effort to keep up with the times, we established a Facebook Page and a website both of which have been very successful. Not forgetting our traditional regular activities, Lunch Club and Walks have still proved popular although at times, it has been a struggle to get the walks going with weather being a major problem!

At the end of 2019, we had 33 members, a figure that has been relatively constant during the 2010s.

## CONCLUSION

However much time has passed and given the huge change in our society, environment and opportunity, it is interesting to note that a lot of what we have done in the past, is still being done today, i.e. fundraising for others, supporting the village and particularly the village hall, organising craft activities and trying out new activities. However, we do seem to have become quite shy about entering competitions!



The next decade presents a continued challenge to encourage more new, and younger, members to join as well as retaining our existing members. By providing new opportunities as well as maintaining our traditions, we hope to meet this challenge.

#### SOURCE MATERIALS

The information from 1938 to the 1980s was taken mainly from the booklets previously prepared (authors unknown): "1938-1978, 40 Years Memories" and "A Window on Eckington WI, 1938 - 1983." The remainder of the information has been taken from WI Records.



## LIST OF PRESIDENTS

1938-1939	MISS CORDELIA M PRICE
1939-1940	MISS ALICE WHITWORTH
1940-1944	MISS ANNE GRICE
1944-1948	MRS G G FARRELL
1948-1950	MRS MARJORIE HERRIDGE
1950-1953	MRS ELEANOR BATEY
1953-1955	MRS KATHLEEN D HUMPHRIES
1955-1956	MRS THELMA HERRIDGE
1956-1959	MRS IRENE WEBB
1959-1961	MRS JEAN CHECKETTS
1961-1963	MRS MARIE JOHNSON
1963-1966	MRS DORA HAYWARD
1966-1968	MRS IRENE WEBB
1968-1970	MRS CHRISTINE McGHIE
1970-1972	MRS ESME KIRKPATRICK
1972-1973	MRS BARBARA HARRIS
1973-1974	MRS SUE SMITH
1974-1975	MRS AVRIL SPIERS
1975-1977	MRS AILSA BIRD
1977-1979	MRS SUE SMITH
1979-1981	MISS WIN JAMES
1981-1983	MRS TONI HARRIS
1983-1985	MRS EVE RANSLEY
1985-1988	MRS JOAN GREEN
1988-1990	MRS MAY ADAMS
1990-1993	MRS JOAN GREEN



1993-1995	MRS PETA WHITLOCK
1995-1996	MRS SYLVIA SMITH
1996-1999	MRS JEANNE ORE
1999-2000	MRS SHEANAGH HICKSON
2000-2001	MRS VIVIAN HODSON
2001-2003	MRS JOAN GREEN
2003-2007	MRS CYNTHIA MORTIMER
2007-2009	MRS NADINE SMITH
2009-2011	MRS CYNTHIA MORTIMER
2011-2014	MRS ANN ANGOOD
2014-2019	MRS CYNTHIA MORTIMER
2019	MRS JENNY DOYLE